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# Watson's Art Journal,

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## DONIZETTI:

HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

BY M. DE THÉMINES.

Translated for the ART JOURNAL from the French,

BY MARGARET OECILIA CLEVELAND.

### XII.

We have seen how Donizetti became a substitute for his sick confrère in writing him an opera. He who does much can do little. There had been many precedents to these polite and obliging substitutions, which were often after renewed. Often he took the place of an artist at rehearsal, and often he wrote no matter what for an embarrassed master. One day Fioravanti begged his attendance at the general rehearsal of an opera that he was to give at the Theatre Nuovo, of Naples. The leader of the orchestra was in

his place, the artists had been prompt, a thing rare enough! Only the prompter was late. Fioravanti stormed and swore. Donizetti calmed him by delivering jokes. At length the prompter arrived; he appeared describing fantastic zigzags. He had lost himself in the vineyards of the Lord, and had found no guide to show him out. Impossible to make him descend in his hole, and if he had gone down!.....

"Never mind," said Donizetti, laughing; "where is the score?"

"What for?" responded Fioravanti, blue with anger.

"Why, to commence the rehearsal."

"And the prompter?"

"Myself." And he descended bravely into the hole.

The rehearsal went as if on wheels. Fioravanti flew upon his friend's neck.

"Do not thank me so much!" said Donizetti, maliciously; "the employment of a prompter is not so bad; there are occasions when I would willingly change my lot with that of this poor devil. Mme. Lipparini has a magnificently moulded leg."

Another time, at the general rehearsal of the first opera of a young composer, whose name I have forgotten, so obscure has it remained, Donizetti was solicited to give some counsels. He never gave a refusal. He was obligingness itself. This time it was the first contrabass who failed.

Donizetti descended into the orchestra and took up the bow.

The leader of the orchestra gave the signal. They attacked the overture. Donizetti passed his bow boldly, energetically over the strings of the grave instrument. At the commencement, he looked at the music open before him, after which he paid no further attention.

The composer, half amazed, half vexed, allowed him to go on.

But, when the overture was finished, he leaned over towards the maestro, and said to him:

"A thousand thanks, maestro, but please look at the score. The basses that you give

are not those that I have written; there must be some mistake of the copyist."

"Leave that to me," replied Donizetti, mildly; "the mistakes are not imputable to the copyist; the basses that I give are precisely those that should be there."

The composer, covered with confusion, resigned. His opera gained a hundred per cent.

It was at this period that the Conservatoire of Naples opened a *concours* for a master of counterpoint. This position was more important than was generally supposed, for Zingarelli, who directed that establishment, was old and an invalid, and in case of his death, they would, very probably, name the master of counterpoint for that situation.

This competition with composers who were of so little importance, was repugnant to Donizetti's feelings; but viewed from another side, he was desirous of holding the position put in *concours*. He took a bias: he sent the titles of his best compositions.

These means were successful; the *concours* was renounced, and he was named unanimously master of counterpoint at the Conservatory of Naples. But Donizetti, in accepting this, made one reservation, that of being free to compose operas, as many as should be demanded of him. They acquiesced to this condition. It was, besides, *sine qua non*.

And well it was that he had imposed this reservation, for from the first year of his entry into his functions, Florence, Naples and Milan each demanded of him a new opera.

He wrote for Florence, *Rosamunda*, which, owing to the censure it received, changed its name and became *Eleanora di Guinena*, a remarkable enough opera, but which was eclipsed by others of the same composer.

For Naples he wrote *Maria Stuarda*. This time censure cried still louder. Mary Stuart! A Queen, and a queen who permitted herself to change husbands so frequently! Better than that, or worse than that, a queen who mounts the scaffold! In short, it was necessary to change the libretto; the poet tortured his brain and constructed a new poem upon the master's music. Behold *Maria Stuarda* metamorphosed into *Buondelmonte*, an episode of Florentine history sung by Dante, one of those thousand struggles between rival families which stained with blood the Italian republics, the hate of the Buondelmonte and the Amedei, a hate equal to that of the Capulets and Montagues, treated by Shakspeare.

The opera had a moderate success, but Donizetti had kept the original libretto, and he attempted later to produce his opera at Milan, as he had written it, adapting the principal rôle to the exceptional powers of Maria Malibran.

At length he wrote for Milan, and during the same year, 1836, *Gemma di Vergy*, taken from the drama of Alexandre Duma's *Charles VII. chez ses grands vassaux*. This opera had a veritable success, and Donizetti wrote it in fourteen days!

Donizetti made the remark, when I took the liberty of saying to him that he composed too quickly, that his most successful operas were precisely those he had written in the least time. What answer could there be to this strange argument? It was without a reply.

For example, one of the most important pieces, the chief piece of this opera, is the finale. The poet, Emmanuel Bidera, had made him wait too long. What would you

have? He could not keep up with the master in this continual steep-chase.

All was ready, and Milan awaited the score.

Donizetti had written letter after letter to Bidera, who smoked cigar upon cigar, but who could not be prevailed upon to produce the unfortunate finale.

At length, one evening, Bidera arrived at the composer's, with the end of a cigar in his mouth and a bundle of little square papers in his hand.

"God be praised!" said Donizetti, "give it to me quickly, and begone."

"But allow me to read it to you first."

"Useless! I know how to read—"

Then turning to his friends (his house was always filled,) he said: "Wait for me a half an hour—smoke, talk, play, do whatever seems good to you, even drum, it is the same to me, I shall soon rejoin you."

A half an hour later, he re-appeared, a large roll of music in his hands.

"Here," he said, "I wish you to hear what I have just improvised: it is the finale of the opera I am to give at Milan."

He went to the piano, and sung the famous finale, a true *chef d'œuvre*!

Who knows! If he had spent a week upon it, it might not have been done so well.

*Gemma di Vergy* had, I repeat, the most brilliant success.

There is in this opera a magnificent tenor rôle, that of "Hassan" (Yacoub,) the negro; it later made the fortune of all the artists who sung it.

## MOZART.

### THE ORIGIN OF THE OXEN-WALTZ.

Who has not heard of, and been delighted with, this sweetest and greatest of all composers? Who has not been carried along by his soaring spirit into higher spheres, forgetting the world with all its woes and pangs, its miseries and insipid joys—glowing into fire in spite of the chills of a *sois-disant* enlightened age, where genius is weighed by dollars and pounds, and respectability by those who are most successful in getting them? Poor Mozart! He lived on the very verge of our sadly enlightened times, and his soul, delighting only in higher entertainments, was often perplexed by the conflict of reality with his ideal world.

Mozart had been in the service of the Emperor of Germany, whose orchestra he directed with more honor than profit to himself. Indeed, so indifferent was his salary, that the master of tunes found himself frequently unable to defray his current expenses. Artists then had not discovered the secret of raising contributions from half a world, in the most agreeable manner possible. They rather stayed at home, living for themselves and their darling muse. And thus perhaps only, and alone, those masterpieces of poetry and melody could rise into existence, which our modern imitators admire, but endeavor in vain to equal. Genius is born; talents are acquired. Tours to Paris, London, and Italy may add to its universality, but not to its originality; and its noble effusions will rise and soar infinitely higher when protected by the homely Lares and Penates, than foreign gods.

Mozart enjoyed, besides this somewhat unprofitable advantage, another: he was indeed a musical genius. Both his form and countenance were pleasing and interesting, but

his health was delicate. Perhaps there never was a living being more sensitive than he. So harmonious, so tender, were the sensations of this extraordinary man, that the least discord that reached his ear thrilled through his whole frame, producing an irritation which frequently endangered his health. When carried away by his muse, his feelings grew so intense that he literally lost the consciousness of everything around him.

It happened that Mozart was sitting one fine morning in his bed, when his wife entered to inform him that a very unmusical being, the butcher, was down stairs with his bill. Mozart, who had been for some time composing one of his greatest operas, the immortal "Clemenza di Tito," was arranging in his phantasia one of its most beautiful airs. He neither saw nor heard his wife. She, a lovely, kind soul, of rather practical views, who had been shortly before married to the young artist, stood waiting for awhile, repeating her information, but no answer followed her words. Seizing the young artist by the elbow, she began to repeat the butcher's account. Mozart was writing without intermission; feeling, however, his arm touched, and hearing sounds whose tenor did not seem to correspond to the harmonious notes of his soul, he shut his ears with his left hand, writing with his right as quickly as the notes could be scribbled.

A second shake of his wife followed. Mozart, growing impetuous, seizing his walking-stick, and his wife, alarmed at so strange an intimation, hastened to the door. The whole had passed without Mozart being in the least conscious of it. She ran down stairs with tears in her eyes, telling the butcher that her husband could not be spoken to, and that he must come another time. But the man of blood was not easily to be daunted—he must have his bill settled and speak with Mozart himself—and he would not send him another ounce of meat. He ascended the stairs. Mozart, indistinctly conscious that something had passed in his presence, had continued pouring the effusions of his phantasia on paper, when the heavy footsteps resounded in the hall. Without turning his eye from the sheet he held his stick against the door to keep out the intruders.

But the steps were approaching. Mozart, more anxious, hurried as fast as he could, when a rap at the door demanded permission to enter. The beautiful effusion was in danger of being lost. The affrighted composer cast a fugitive glance at his stick; it was too short. With anxiety bordering on frenzy he looked around his room, and a pole standing behind the curtain caught his eye; this he seized, holding it with all his might against the door, writing like fury all the while. The knob was turned, but the pole withstood the first effort. A pause succeeded; words were heard on the staircase, and the intruders renewed their efforts the second time. But the strength of the composer seemed to increase with his anxiety. Large drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. Stemming the pole against his left breast, with the force of despair he still kept out the visitors. He succeeded but for a moment, yet it was a precious moment; the delightful air was poured upon the paper—it was saved!

Such had been the anxiety, fear and despair of the composer; so intense his feelings, that his bodily strength was not equal to